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The West Should Not Bail Out Poland

By STANSFIELD TURNER

The President's economic reprisals against the Polish martial law government and the Soviet Union are more signals of intent than punitive actions. What is it in our national interest to do next if the repression of the Polish people does not cease?

There are strong reasons not to press further unless the Soviets actually invade Poland. More stringent economic sanctions would be likely to cause a rift with our European allies; reopen the whole vexing issue of the grain embargo; damage some 60 American banks that hold \$11.3 billion of Polish debt; upset humanitarians who want to provide food to the Polish people in their crisis; and bury the thought that if we can keep the Polish economy afloat, democratic tendencies of the Solidarity labor movement may yet survive.

But whatever the merits of these arguments, the overriding consideration that should govern U.S. policy on Poland today

is that the Soviets are in such deep trouble that they must subsidize the Polish economy and must prevent a Polish default on debts to the West.

The Soviets cannot let the economy of Poland drop below a humane level. To do so would risk uncontrollable public disorders. In turn, that would force the Soviets to take over the country with military force. They simply cannot afford to lose control of Poland and their military line of communication to East Germany and the border with NATO.

The Soviets have endured much over the past 16 months rather than invade Poland. Clearly they measure the costs of invasion as high. Indeed they would be in terms of a major blow to detente, of reduced trade and credits with the West and of weakened military preparedness vis-a-vis NATO. To the Soviets the costs of continued subsidy of Poland look like a bargain compared with the incalculably larger bill of occupation. At the same time, the

Soviets are very resentful of the problems that the Poles are causing them. They will not provide more than the minimal subsidy required to maintain order. Hence, whatever aid we might provide in the name of humanitarianism or long-term political gain will simply have the effect of reducing the Soviets' contribution by a like amount. Our most humanitarian impulses will be thwarted.

If, on the other hand, the Soviets should decide that they positively want to generate an excuse for invading Poland by forcing food riots, no amount of help that we might provide could prevent that. The Polish economy is tied to the Soviet bloc, not to the U.S. and Western Europe.

The Soviets must also try hard not to let Poland default on its debts to the West. Such a default could severely curtail Western lending to the other East European Communist states and even to the Soviet Union. All of those economies are in trouble. All are counting on, and receiving,

machinery, technology and spare parts from the West—on credit.

Could the Soviets foot the bill for Poland's debt payments? Of course they could. It would not be easy or pleasant for them (and that is one reason that they have tried so desperately to avoid occupying Poland). They would have to reduce their purchases of grain and technology from the West. They would have to generate more foreign exchange by selling gold, by marketing more oil to the free world rather than consuming it in military operations in Afghanistan or selling it to Eastern Europe for soft currency, and by other feasible, but difficult devices.

Admittedly, there is a risk that without Western credits, the economies of the Soviet bloc will all spiral downward and jeopardize not only the \$27 billion of Polish debt the West holds, but the \$17 billion of the Soviet Union's and lesser amounts of the other Eastern Europeans'. But how viable are these loans anyway, if the only

way to protect them is to make more loans? The loans can be made viable only by fundamental economic reforms in all these countries. That means a greater orientation toward market forces. Because that contravenes Communist political ideology, it can be achieved only under severe economic pressures. The hope, then, for keeping Solidarity's flame alive lies in the Soviets seeing that the economic burden of Poland would be unbearable if they did not compromise with Solidarity to keep the Polish economy afloat. The more we help, the less pressure for such compromise.

Let us not, then, believe that we have either a humanitarian imperative or a political necessity to come to the aid of Poland at this time. The Soviets are over a barrel. It is their problem. Let us not rush to help them solve it.

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